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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the silences that arise when female educational administrators reflect on their practices during most public discussions, seminars, and lectures. The term "silence" refers to the situation in which people who perceive themselves as less powerful than those from the dominant culture (that is, women and minorities) tend to not participate in the public discourse. Part 1 describes the forms that silences take: (1) the actual silence--not being able to enter into the discourse; (2) the silence of resistance--deciding not to participate; and (3) the denial--not realizing the existence of another discourse. Part 2 describes strategies for working with the silences, implemented at the Management Development Centre (Institute of Education, University of London). At the center, participants must decide whether to engage in or change discourses. Strategies include power-sharing activities and learning to read the silences. Programs are planned to give participants current information, the opportunity to extend professional development, and time to reflect on practice. (LMI)

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WORKING WITH SILENCES:

Planning Management Development Programmes Which Work for Women too

The European Network for Improving Research and Development in Educational Management

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WORKING WITH SILENCES: Planning Management Development Programmes Which Work for Women Too.

I would like to talk about one of the key issues in the learning process of women professionals to which we pay attention in the Management Development Centre when we plan our development programmes for school managers. I mean the silences that are part of most discussions, seminars and lectures when experienced women professionals are reflecting on their practice. Then I would like to describe some of the strategies we have evolved in order to take account of this issue: how do we work with these silences, especially in mixed groups?

PART ONE: THE SILENCES

Magda Gere Lewis (1993) writes:

> As a woman who teaches women, I am among those feminist teachers and scholars who have worried about the way women's silences have been coded in the academy. I have worried, as well, about how I might look anew at the practices and possible meanings associated with women's silence as a function of our multiple and complex social location. More specifically, as I contemplate pedagogical strategies in classrooms heterogeneous in gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual desire, and age, I ask myself how it might be possible to formulate a conceptual understanding of women's silence not, as has been traditionally the case, as a lack that concretely reaffirms women's nonexistence, but rather as the source of an active transformative practice.
>
> (page 2 - 3)

I read Magda Gere Lewis's work as I was trying to make sense, first for myself, then for my students, of the way many women (and people from ethnic minorities) work in my classes. It seemed to me to capture perfectly the necessity for a teacher to see silences as positive and useful and to be worked *with*, not against or around.

In the work we do in London, we find that many women and people from ethnic minorities either encounter difficulties when attempting to enter the prevailing discourse of the group, or choose not to enter it - in other words, they do not take part in the discussions we hold in courses about school management. It will be necessary to describe here the forms the "silences" take in people who feel themselves to be less powerful than those who appear to be part of the dominant culture of the group.

I am sure that you will recognise the forms as I describe them to you - at least one of them was shared by several of us here. Other forms do not initially seem to be silences, but I think it is important to see them in this way because they signify barred access to dominant discourses.

* ***The Actual Silence - not being able to enter into the discourse***

I think that this is the silence that Magda Gere Lewis writes about as often interpreted "as a lack that concretely reaffirms women's nonexistence". This is the time when the tutor asks a mixed group a question and the men respond. It is necessary to look behind the women's silence to try to understand what is happening. In order to do so, I will take as my first example an experience

I had at the ENIRDEM conference last year in Katowice.

I came to ENIRDEM for the first time last year, so I was not absolutely clear about the way things happen in this organisation - I was not sure of the ENIRDEM discourse. I was initially quite watchful and careful, looking for the indicators that would signal the prevailing discourses to me. Ball (1990) writes

> Discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, and with what authority. Discourses embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations... Thus the possibilities for meaning and for definition, are pre-empted through the social and institutional position held by those who use them. (page 2)

I came with a prepared paper which described the thinking, writing and teaching about women and educational management with which I had been involved in the Institute of Education for several years - a discourse in which I was firmly embedded in my own professional life in London. However, I was coming to another set of discourses with which I was not familiar, and in which the signifiers were not clear to me. For example, my questions about ENIRDEM included: to what extent did speakers cite references and statistics when they gave a paper? Did they give papers on their *thinking* about educational management, or were all papers research-based? How many people would I be talking to? Did speakers use overhead projectors, microphones, and flipcharts? To what extent was there general agreement to talk about issues of social justice and equality of opportunity? Did people give provocative papers? Did women talk about gender issues? Did people ask questions at the end of papers?

In other words, I wondered what constituted a scholarly paper at ENIRDEM conferences, and whether my paper would fit the ENIRDEM discourse of good, or scholarly, papers. Naturally I wrote my paper before I went to Katowice, so I came to a dominant discourse and tried to enter it, without being able to give myself enough time, inside a watchful silence, to read the indicators.

The reactions to my paper were so complicated that I realised much later that there *was* no dominant discourse. I know now that for some people, I said nothing new, for some people what I said was too uncomfortable to hear, and for some other people, mainly women, I was saying something publicly that they wanted to hear said aloud.

Immediately after I had given the paper though, I felt as if I had had my "non-existence affirmed". As I finished speaking, someone who I identified with the dominant discourse seemed to say forcefully that this issue was not important. I interpreted this as a comment on the lack of scholarly evidence in my paper. I was silenced. Not only could I not find a way of answering this comment, but also, I realised that anyone else who shared my interests was also silenced. I sat inside that silence feeling ashamed and unscholarly.

Afterwards, individually and in small groups, people, mainly women came to tell me that I had said something very important to them. And since then, for the last year, contacts from ENIRDEM have kept this debate alive for me. The forcefulness of what felt like the dominant discourse silenced those for whom the discourse I was introducing made sense. I had given a paper about power, about the access to power for women, and about the ways that power could

be shared more equably between men and women in education management. Those who already felt less powerful, the women, could not immediately and publicly affirm and reinforce the tentative introduction of a subject which was important to them. We were all silenced, until we could find a way of resisting what we thought was the dominant discourse - by talking in small groups.

The possibilities that silenced me were that I was not scholarly enough; that what I was saying was not important; that I did not know enough about my chosen subject to present it in a scholarly way; or that I did not understand what everybody else there might be saying about the subject.

And this is often what happens to the women and the people from ethnic minorities with whom we work. They are not used to feeling part of the dominant discourse, or to thinking that what they have to offer to any discussion will be recognised as valuable. So they respond with silence in the carefully measured spaces that are offered to them. We all know about the five or ten minutes that we plan at the end of a talk or lecture to answer questions! People who ask questions need to be very sure of themselves intellectually, in order to

a. quickly understand the lecture and make sense of it within their own reality;
b. formulate questions which are articulate;
c. have enough courage to be ready to stand up to public scrutiny.

(I realise that I am ensuring now that once again, there will be silence after my paper!)

So this actual silence, of not being able to enter the discourse, can be based on insecurity, an apparent lack of knowledge, or just a need for more time to think.

In England, too, we have a style of verbal wit which is meant to show speed of thinking. Not many women are initially trained to think in this way, and so not many women are able to take part in verbal gymnastics. Their silence is often seen as general lack of ability.

This brings me on to the second type of silence:

**** The Silence of Resistance - deciding not to take part***

Not many women are comfortable taking part in those gymnastics, so not many want to compete in them. In the same way, many women see the prevailing dominant discourses as framed by a patriarchal society. And a way of resisting the patriarchy of the society is to refuse to enter the dominant discourse.

A clear example this form of resistance is a disturbing session I had with a group of more than twenty women students, three months ago. They were all teachers, some of them senior managers in schools, all of them women who had chosen to make advanced academic study of school management. They came from eight different countries, and so the response to our discussion was not a purely Anglo-centric one.

I was leading a session with them about women as teachers and managers, and we were exploring

leadership styles. We were talking about whether in general, women brought different ways of managing to school management, and so whether it was important to encourage more women into school management (in Britain, they are under-represented at senior levels in schools). It has always been absolutely clear to me that I *should* be encouraging more women into educational management, so here I was taking great pleasure in talking to what I thought was a captive group of women who were potentially superb school leaders.

Suddenly the group fell silent, and it was as though the same puzzling look passed across all their faces. I could not read the puzzling look, and asked them what was happening. I cannot capture their collective tone clearly enough as they explained very patiently to me that leading schools was such an awful and impossible job that they were very happy to leave it to men, and to those few women who wanted to do it. School management, as constructed in Britain at the moment, is framed within a very male discourse of the market place, competition, hierarchy, finance, and inspection. Rather than entering it and attempting to colonise this discourse by making it more congenial to teachers and learners, these women generally felt that they did not even want to attempt entry. They wanted to leave it alone, fearing that they may have had to risk their own integrity in order to survive the alien discourse. They did not want to become school leaders.

On a lighter note, I often watched my daughter infuriate her father and brother as she grew up attempting to play competitive games non-competitively. When playing tennis, she wanted to hit the ball to her opponent rather than away to a part of the court where they could not reach. And she invented rules for board games like Monopoly which included sharing out all the winnings equally, rather than locating them all with one person. She refused to enter their discourse of winning, and tried to replace it with her own discourse of sharing.

It seems to me that girls and women have always attempted to re-frame dominant and dominating discourses of autocracy and leadership in order to introduce notions of co-operation and team work. Research and writing (Marshall, 1984) (Helgesen, 1993) into gendered aspects of leadership have shown that on the whole, women professional leaders tend to work more collaboratively than men, and with greater attention to the people whom they manage. I was disappointed in my class with the women teachers because they were deciding not even to attempt to colonise the dominant discourse of the market place. Their silence was a powerful form of planned resistance.

**** Denial - not realising that there is another discourse***

Twice recently, I have talked with women who were highly successful professionally, and who told me that in their view, there was no problem for women who want both professional success and private contentment. Both times, the women thought that there was no unfairness in society's positioning of women professionals. They were sure that women had equal access to professional opportunities, and they knew that they were able to make free and conscious professional and domestic choices about their activities. One conversation was with a teacher from southern Europe, and the other conversation was with two women, one a school leader, from Central Europe.

Here, too, I am describing a form of silence: if we do not know that there is another discourse to enter, another way of constructing our lived lives, there is nothing to discuss and nothing to

change - there is no transformation necessary.

I would like to give a closer account of the conversations with these women, in order to show what I mean about the difficulties some women still encounter when attempting to balance private contentment with professional success. Indeed, we see here their eventual acknowledgement of the difficulty of challenging the dominant discourse of the personal lives of women as secondary to their partners, despite professional success.

So, both conversations began with denial. The woman from southern Europe said that she was sure that nowadays, all choices women make about their careers are free and open. There is no longer pressure from society to be wife and mother first, and professionally successful second. A women can choose for herself how she leads her life. Then she did some reading about women and career choices. And eventually she came to the conclusion that her own first marriage had ended in divorce because she had been about to overtake her husband professionally. Her choices had not been made entirely freely - there were societal expectations and social constructions put on her marriage which had limited her professional expectations. In choosing to respond to professional expectations, she had been seen as "sacrificing" her home and family. And the home life could not withstand that pressure.

She stopped denying the other discourses when she realised that her choices were not made freely, and she eventually found her new voice when she wrote a long and powerful essay as her entry into what Freire called the "transformative dialogue" (Gold 1993, page 22).

The conversations with the women from Central Europe also showed a denial of other ways of being and thinking. They showed the price that many women still pay to retain both their private lives and their professional success, without even realising that they are paying a higher price than their men. One of these women told a group of women from other parts of Europe that there was no lack of equality of opportunity for professional success for women in education in her country. And the statistics she quoted bore out this assertion - equal access to leadership posts for women; similar ages and career backgrounds for men and women; and once in post, women are allowed to manage as they choose. The other women found this very hard to accept, and interestingly enough, could not believe that there was not a dominant discourse that disadvantaged and disempowered women. Finally however, it became clear that these women paid a price in their private lives - they had to work much harder at home than the men. We were told that after a hard day leading a large and successful secondary school, this headteacher went home to her family and cooked a three course meal. The pride with which she told us that she used no frozen or pre-prepared ingredients showed that the inequity of the length of her working day, combining professional and domestic labour and compared with that of her husband, had never occurred to her.

There was then a moral dilemma for the other women listening. This couple had reached domestic stability at the cost of a far longer and harder working day for the wife. Who had the right to challenge that stability? The outcome was that this woman chose not to take part in a piece of research into the working conditions for women school leaders, because she could not see the difference between the conditions for men and women. She could not or would not see and then challenge the dominant discourse of the place of women as servicer to the family. Her silence excluded her from the research, but protected her marriage.

There are other silences apparent in management development courses - those of the ***mismatching discourses*** (people who have different expectations of a course from the published ones); and ***silences that come from anger*** - those people who have been sent on the courses against their will, and are keen to sabotage the proceedings because of their anger with their own managers. I do not intend to develop these further here, because they do not seem to me to occur more commonly in women than in men.

I do not think it is necessary to eliminate silences in our work, rather, I think it is important to understand them. If our work is a form of transformative dialogue which models the transformative dialogues hopefully taking place in institutions concerned with education, then it is important to be able to "read" the silences that occur. A management development tutor should be aware of power balances in the classroom, so that there is clarity about whether the silences are from those who are barred by the dominant discourse, from those who *choose* not to enter the dominant discourse, or from those who are unable to recognise and separate the relevant discourses. It could also be from those people who need more silence in order to think and to operate successfully.

PART TWO: WORKING WITH THE SILENCES

> Our need as feminist teachers is to find a pedagogic practice that can address women in terms other than through the patriarchic symbolic order. Just as this requires more than offering women spaces within which to speak ... it requires more than "including women" in the curriculum. I question what sort of understanding of women's silence is required in order to see in it women's concrete and active engagement of the world as social, political, and economic agents.
>
> (Magda Gere Lewis 1994:pages 2 - 3)

Having begun to interpret the silences, the first question for those who work regularly with women and people from ethnic minorities is whether to challenge the dominant patriarchic discourse or to whether to suggest strategies for entry into it as it stands. In other words, when talking about offering power to those who traditionally feel powerless, do we re-define power, or do we develop strategies to make the challengers feel more powerful within the traditional definition of power?

Within our management development programmes, do we see "management" as neutral, and suggest ways of managing that many women feel comfortable with, and that are empowering to all who are managed? Or do we take traditional discourses of management as more masculine and driven, and train people to develop techniques which engage in *that* discourse?

At the Management Development Centre we are clear that our participants must decide for themselves whether to engage in or to attempt to change discourses. We see our work as educators as helping to define the world-to-be-managed, and we offer an understanding of contexts and necessary skills and qualities for our students to employ as they see fit. Schön's (1991) "reflective practitioner" suggests ways of bringing skills, qualities and understandings together.

I want to look in more detail at some of the teaching and development strategies we have evolved which offer an understanding of education management and ways of doing it, while paying attention to the silences which indicate the sense of involvement of our participants. I will refer back to the silences described in the first part of this paper, attempting to attach some "pedagogic practices" where relevant.

One of our aims in running our management development programmes is to allow as many people to engage in the transformative dialogue about management as empowering, as possible. All our literature about our work states that our

> *management development programmes are planned to give participants up-to-date information, the opportunity to extend professional development and the time to reflect on practice.*

Our participants are already effective and experienced teachers and managers. In order to allow them to enter the transformative dialogue, we think that it is important to make our pedagogy clear to them. In this way, they are aware of what teaching methods we are using, and thus are much more active in their own learning than if they did not know what was going to happen to them.

We are aware that valuable information about the way we work is transmitted by our pre-programme materials, by the attention we pay to the building, the rooms, the decor and the way we set out our rooms, by the way we greet new participants, by the coffee and biscuits we offer them, by the tones of our voices and by the timing and pace of our introductions. In other words, the "meaning and social relations" (Ball 1990: page 20) of our particular discourse of adult learning is evident all around our organisation. It is built on our respect for previous professional experience, and on our belief that our participants have the right to make informed choices about the way they manage their organisations. We think it is our responsibility to help them to become fully informed, to offer them time to reflect on their present practice, and to give them the opportunity to develop strategies to plan changes and refinements so that they might manage with more integrity in the future.

**** Power-sharing activities***

So, how do we work with the silences of those who find it difficult to enter the discourse? I have written previously that women and people from ethnic minorities are often least able initially to enter the discussions. What is it that we do that encourages people to complete their evaluations with comments such as:

> "Gained self-confidence. Felt I could speak out; the atmosphere created was very pleasant and confidence giving."

received from a woman at the end of a course in July this year? First, we are explicit about our teaching methodology in all the pre-course materials. We hope that our respect for professional experience is made clear by the way in which we explain that there will be small group work, that participants will be encouraged to talk about their own work, and that we offer several opportunities to reflect on that experience during the programme. A tone of respectful approachability is set by our welcome, and course members are encouraged to become responsible

for their own learning when we ask them to reflect privately about the way they learn. After the private reflection, we ask the whole group what they need to ask for from us and from each other in order to make their learning on the course as effective as possible. This often precipitates a discussion about adult learning that puts issues like "silences", "respect for other opinions", "time to think", on to the agenda - we can already begin to talk about the differences in learning habits, and in access to dominant discourses. It becomes acceptable to discuss learning styles and power balances.

Although the work we do is rigorous, linking theory with practice and offering time to make plans for new ways of managing, it is not formal. We have found that the academic formality of uninterrupted lectures from a lecturer standing on a podium at the front of the class compounds the sense of an impenetrable or difficult- to-penetrate dominant discourse. Rather, we work with handouts, small and large group discussions, short inputs from tutors, and questions from tutors which respect the experience of the participants. The tutor does not necessarily know the answers to the questions she is asking, but is happy to help make sense of the issues under discussion in order to help formulate useful answers collaboratively.

It is always important to ensure that participants understand the context of their managed world. Good teaching with relevant information, both written and spoken ensures that the context is made clear. It is not necessary, however, for all teaching to come directly from the course tutor. In fact this traditional relationship replicates the notion of powerful and knowledgeable teacher and powerless and ignorant learner. If the transformative dialogue is intended to empower the learner, empowering strategies are necessary which offer the learner more power.

Our ethos of respect for experience, our slower pace of discussion, our pauses and productive silences, all allow participants to reflect on their practices, and to push their thinking further than they usually think.

We plan many small group activities, and we are very careful about planning the groups so that they reflect a balance of experience and background. For example, we try to make sure that gender and ethnic backgrounds are balanced, and that people form minorities are not isolated, unsupported by others. We also try to ensure that people from different professional experiences listen to each other, and are neither detached nor marginalised. These small groups are often the most fertile arenas for discussion, for the development of ideas, and for furthering understandings about the context of education. Course evaluations often refer to the learning from other course members, and the value of people with common professional backgrounds sharing effective strategies and good practice. We suggest relevant group tasks which involve problem-solving, rôle play, and case studies, and the work as a result of these tasks often leads people into places and information that they did not have before. For example, some women, such as the ones who had not understood their societal positions, find themselves with others like themselves, who *have* understood. And they learn from each other.

**** Reading the Silences***

This way of working demands concentration from all present. It means that all contributions are valued and there are no right or wrong answers - framing the answers takes time and thought, and is a profoundly collaborative experience. There are often silences during this process, and this is

the time when it is particularly important to "read" the silences.

- It may be that the silences indicate deep thought and a struggle to formulate useful answers.

- It may be that the silences indicate that the questions asked by the tutor were either not helpful, or were not understood.

- And it might be that the silences are still those of the impenetrable discourse.

If the silence cannot be read it is necessary for the tutor to check what it means. I have often asked a group: "what does this silence mean?"

The first silence is a comfortable working silence which is a pleasure for all involved in it. It is the productive silence of the reflective practitioner. The other two silences are not comfortable, and must be clarified in order to allow work to be done. They are closely linked, and clarifying questions often allow more people to enter the discourse. The first set of silences slows down difficult-to-enter discussions so that people who are worried that they need time to compose perfect answers are given more time, and they begin to learn that it is acceptable to risk tentative contributions.

Hypothetically, it should be possible for course participants to make a conscious decision not to enter a discourse. If the context of the discourse is fully understood, and if the decision is taken from a position of power rather than powerlessness, then why talk? I have had assertive women participants on courses who say that they speak up regularly in their schools. They would like the opportunity to remain silent and listen for a change. And I spoke earlier about the women who wished to be able to choose not to become school leaders.

Unfortunately, the nature of group dynamics usually means that those who consciously decide to remain silent are invested with more power than those who talk. The paradox is that they appear to be using their power to judge the proceedings. I say "paradox" because I am thinking about all the disempowered people who feel silenced and disempowered in group discussions. So group discussions which take place round people who have chosen to remain silent can be uncomfortable and less productive. However, the development of a culture which encourages the analysis of power balances within groups of people - an important management skill - is part of a good management development programme.

We find that slowing down the pace of discussions within groups by encouraging pauses and silences seems to make it easier for everyone to take part. Even those who decide not to speak often contribute. This may be because they become so involved that they forget to remain silent. But it could also be that what they saw as an informed decision not to enter a discourse was made without full access to an understanding of the context - sometimes the richest group discussions broaden understandings.

* ***Final comment***

I wrote this paper in order to look at the silences which occur when experienced women professional school managers try to engage in the transformative dialogue of a management development programme. I hope that I have offered ways of seeing these silences as helpful or

unhelpful distributions of power. It was my intention that the strategies I have outlined for working with these silences will help to transform the disempowered into the empowered and allow those who do not usually speak to find a voice.

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